

John Guzzwell And Trekka.



Hawaii Bound October 1955. Photograph by John Guzzwell

Perhaps not everyone has heard of John Guzzwell. Born 1930 in England but some-time living in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, he has only a passing acquaintance with Queenscliff in Australia; he entered and departed Port Phillip on the ketch Tzu Hang in November - December 1956.

In mid 1953, John, while working as a maintenance carpenter in Victoria for the Canadian Pacific Railway Ferry Service, decided to build himself a sailing boat. For fifty pounds sterling, the English yacht designer Laurent Giles planned a 20ft 6in yawl which John built mostly unaided and with hand tools in a rented shed behind a fish and chip shop. He launched his dream, Trekka, in August 1954, and in September 1955, he sailed for Hawaii. Over the next four years he completed a circumnavigation in Trekka, then the smallest vessel ever to do so, and finally returned to Canada in 1959. He wrote a book of his adventures, "Trekka Round The World" which he re-published in 1999.

On the way to Hawaii, John met Miles and Beryl Smeeton, owners of the 46 foot ketch, Tzu Hang. Also on board Tzu Hang were Clio, the Smeetons' fourteen year old daughter, Poopah, Clio's little dog, Pwe, Beryl Smeeton's Siamese cat, and two of the Smeetons' friends.

John and the Smeetons spent some months cruising and exploring the Hawaiian islands before crossing the Pacific via Fanning Island, the Samoan Group, and Tonga, to New Zealand. John's descriptions of the pre-tourist boom islands are a fascinating view of a lost world. Trekka was stored with friends in New Zealand, because John had decided to join the Smeetons on Tzu Hang. They intended to sail to Melbourne for the Olympic Games, and after the Games, return to England via Cape Horn. Clio and Poopah returned to England by air a few days before Tzu Hang left Port Phillip on Friday 24 December 1956.

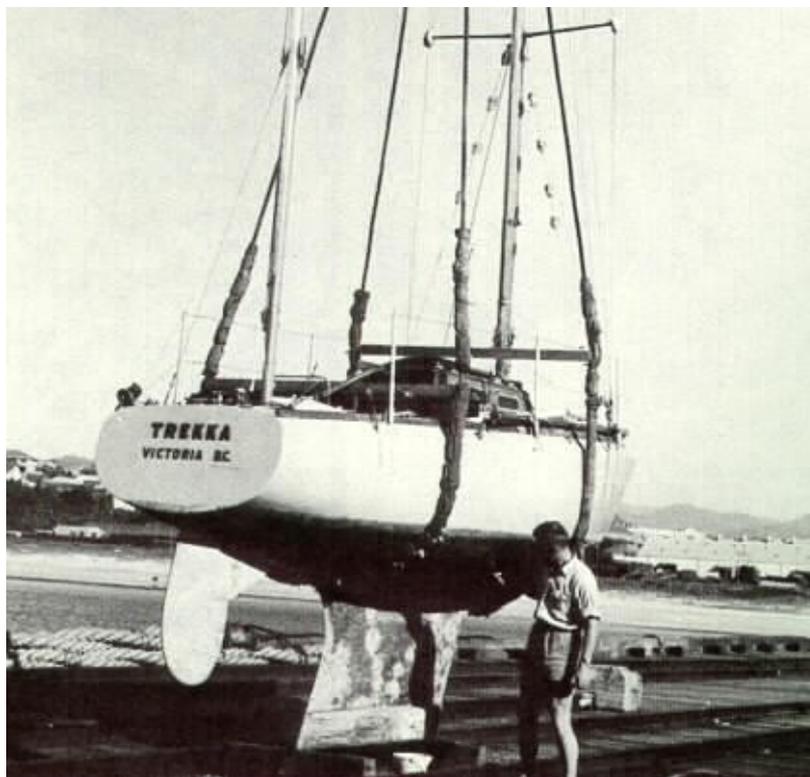


Tzu Hang in the Yarra River, Melbourne, December 1956. A. Campbell-Drury photograph.

The Charles Grimes and Bolte bridges built since 1956 have closed this part of the Yarra River near Spencer Street to masted vessels.

Both John and Miles Smeeton have separately written accounts of the Tzu Hang's Southern Ocean voyage which included a pitch-poling and dis-masting about one thousand miles west of the entrance to the Magellan Straits. John took a number of still photographs and some sixteen millimetre movie footage of the voyage including a sequence filmed just before the pitch-poling. At least some of the movie footage can be found on the internet. Tzu Hang looks tiny in the big seas. Miles Smeeton later wrote a book of the voyage, "Once Is Enough." (various publishers - still in print). Under a jury rig, Tzu Hang reached a Chilean port, was repaired, and the Smeetons set off without John to a second disaster in the Southern Ocean.

In December 1957, John was back in New Zealand. After giving *Trekka* a complete overhaul, he sailed for Sydney in April 1958. A couple of gales, an encounter with the south-flowing East Australian Current, and a fortnight of calms saw him making a landfall on the New South Wales coast at Trial Bay, finally reaching Coffs Harbour on May 26 1958.



Trekka on the wharf at Coffs Harbour. A John Guzzwell Photograph.

Trekka had not been anti-fouled before leaving New Zealand. At Coffs Harbour she was craned out and back in for the then equivalent of one dollar and eighty five cents.

Then John began a mostly leisurely northward cruise of Australia's East Coast. It began with a cyclone off Cape Byron and finished at Thursday Island in September 1958. Like his account of cruising among the Hawaiian Islands, this part of his book describes a Queensland coast and a way of life that has vanished in the succeeding fifty years.

Obviously there had to be a crossing of the Indian Ocean: there were stops at Cocos, Mauritius, and Reunion Islands. There was a stay at Durban in South Africa followed by an exciting journey to Capetown, and then the Atlantic crossing via St. Helena and Ascension to Barbados and the Panama Canal. His transit of the Canal cost two dollars and sixteen cents US. The last stage of the circumnavigation was a sixty day voyage, Balboa to Hawaii, then a re-crossing of the Pacific to Victoria.

John went on to a successful career as a boat builder in many parts of the world. He is still working and lives at Seattle in the USA.

Trekka completed two more circumnavigations with different owners. She is now held by the Maritime Museum of British Columbia. At present she is being re-furbished for the Museum by Tony Grove, a Canadian craftsman and boat builder.

